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ABSTRACT

This book examines the American experience in liberal education and demonstrates that there has been a "crisis" surrounding the curriculum of the modern U.S. university for the past two centuries. It points out where and how contemporary critics of the curriculum are wrong, historically speaking, and shows how American ideals of "liberal education" are extraordinarily obscure, the product of many different attitudes and historical intentions. The writer selects examples from the history of liberal education ranging from the "battle of the books" between Oxford and representatives of the Scottish Enlightenment at the turn of the 19th-century, to the struggle over "Western Culture" at Stanford University in the early 1980s. Among the other topics considered are the 19th-century debates over religious and secular learning, the origins and inherent contradictions of courses in civics and Western civilization, and programs in the "great books." An appendix contains the text of "Citizenship in a Democratic World" (Edgar Eugene Robinson), a lecture given to entering freshmen at Stanford in 1928. Contains 160 references and an index. (GLR)

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